

Caldwell Co. ATC Instructor Ruth Gray Believes Student Organizations Part of Total Package

Upon graduation from Murray State University with a bachelor degree in Vocational Home Economics, Ruth Gray became the culinary arts instructor at the Caldwell Co. ATC. That was 24 years ago.

“I was just going to teach for two years so that I could use my teaching certificate. But, I’m still here,” says Ruth. “It’s because of the students and of course student organizations. That’s all a part of the total package.”

During her first year as a teacher and advisor, she took three students to the Kentucky VICA (now called KY SkillsUSA) State Conference - one was a culinary arts student entered in competition. It was during this time that Ruth learned a valuable lesson she would never forget.

“At the time, I was unaware of the fact that all students were supposed to bring their own tools for competition. So,



when we arrived in Louisville, we were without the necessary equipment to compete,” says Ruth. “It just so happened that I had numerous college friends there and they were able to help me get my student all of the required equipment for competition. We pulled from every source including church kitchens. It was quite an experience and I learned my lesson. Now days, communication is much better throughout the system.”

Over her tenure, she has been to state conference every year except for one. The only reason she missed that year was because she was also an advisor for another student organization - Home Economics Related Occupations (HERO), now called FCCLA (Family, Career and Community Leaders of America) and both conferences were held at the same time.

Ruth originally started working with skills competition and then expanded to the leadership development side of the student organization. From 1991-93, she had the honor of being on the National VICA culinary technical committee. During later years in Kansas City, she had an opportunity to judge during national competition.

“One of our carpentry students, Todd Lear, ran for office during the 1993 National Conference held in Louisville,” says Gray. “This gave me a chance to work with Mary Ann Bratton, the KY state officer advisor during that time. This helped prepare me for duties that I would later take over. She was wonderful to work with. Mary Ann was big on protocol and I learned a lot from her. We are still friends today.”

During the 1993-94 school year, Ruth began working with state officers. At that time, her major responsibility was transporting students to the various required activities. Since that time, Caldwell Co. ATC students have always held one or more state officer positions. Some of the duties of the state officer advisor include working closely with the state director in helping train state officers, writing scripts for KLTl and state conferences, getting information out to advisors of state officers and to the state officers about meetings, traveling, and conferences.

In 1994, Ruth was selected as an advisor to attend Skills Canada, an international student competition. She was able to take one Caldwell Co. student - quite an honor for any advisor. During the previous year, two Caldwell Co. students competed during the international conference and Ruth was able to help train and advise both of those kids.

In 1996, Caldwell Co. ATC Principal Arthur Dunn and Ruth became Co-Regional VICA directors. A regional director is on the KY SkillsUSA State Board.

“It’s our job to work with people in our region to make sure everyone is aware of the rules and regulations governing all competitions and events. We also help host skills and leadership events in each respective district,” says Ruth. “The board meets four times a year and the director gives quarterly updates. This allows us to come back and disseminate that information to the schools within our region.”

“Ms. Gray spends endless hours working with SkillsUSA students at the local, district, state and national levels. Her dedication is second to none. I am always amazed at how she is able to connect with students and ultimately has a major impact on their lives by gently pushing and driving them in the right direction,” says Caldwell Co. ATC Principal Arthur Dunn. “In addition to her teaching responsibilities and working with students to help them succeed, she has been a rock when it comes to organizing activities on the local and district levels as co-regional director. Her commitment to excellence has not been attained by only doing what is required - it has been achieved by going above and beyond what is required. She’s a state treasure and I’m glad she is part of our team.”



One of many good times Ruth remembers was taking a group of students to Washington DC for the Washington Leadership Training Institute (WLTI).

“We were unable to get into the capitol for a tour because we had been out on the steps taking pictures with Senator Wendell Ford and this caused us to be late. One of the state officers saw a guard outside the gate. She went up to the guard and introduced herself. She told him what they had been doing for the day, but that they really wanted to tour the capitol. The guard was so impressed; he took the whole group on a personal tour - into places that most people never get to see,” says Ruth. “To my students, this was really an event. They began to understand the importance of good citizenship, dressing properly and presenting themselves in a positive manner. All the kids remarked that it must have been their ‘official red jacket’ that helped them to get this special tour. The kids had even taken the time to explain to the guard about what VICA was and what it meant to be a state officer.”

To Ruth, teaching students and working with state officers has been a learning experience and new adventure every year because of all the different personalities.

“I’ve learned to always have a plan and to be prepared. On my very first trip to Washington, we had to go through several fire drills in the hotel in the middle of the night. We didn’t know where to meet because we were on different floors. It was then that I realized the importance of having a plan of where to meet for any circumstance,” says Ruth. “So, every time state officers get together, that’s the first order of business - creating a plan of where to meet.”



She recounts “John Marks was the man originally responsible for taking our KY state officers to WLTl. As a result of this experience, KLTl was born and has been in existence since the spring of 1994.”

“My association with Ruth was born in the ‘trenches.’ We both have a passion for VICA and for students. With me, it was a deep love for the organization and what it can do for students; but for Ruth it was a deep love for students and what they can do for the organization. I think both are necessary,” says OCTE Education and Training Division Director John Marks. “One is based in the mind and the other is based in the heart. Organizational philosophy, structure and management may change, but the heart of VICA (SkillsUSA) must *always* be a love for the students.”



Held in high esteem by her colleagues, she is described by Caldwell Co. ATC Health Sciences Instructor Vicki Wilcox as “the best person that I have ever known. She goes way above her call of duty.”

“I know when I was in high school I had Ms. Gray for a teacher. She was always a good teacher for me. She’s good to the kids, staff and is good with the SkillsUSA VICA Club. She usually stays late and works really hard with all the kids,” says Caldwell Co. Custodian Barbara Orr.

“I’ve known Ms. Gray for three years and have always thought she was a wonderful teacher. She’s patient and caring. To me, she makes sure the information is available for

the students and she's very hands-on. I've never seen her behind her desk because she is always in the middle of everyone. She's wonderful and the kids love her," says Lyon Co. School Bus Driver Laura Dunstan.



From l to r: Ms. Gray, Tiffany Weaver, a junior from Dawson Springs HS; Billie Jo Keith, a junior from Dawson Springs HS; and Tiffany Sherman, a Dawson Springs HS junior proudly show off a decorated cake.

Caldwell Co. ATC Custodian Michael Andrews says, “She is a fine lady. She’s always here late. A lot of times she comes in early and it’s all for the kids.”

“Working with advisors across the state has been rewarding because we have developed great relationships and helped each other,” says Ruth. “Mr. Dunn has always been very supportive of student organizations and helped me in whatever I needed to do. He’s a wonderful principal and easy to work with. But most importantly, I just love seeing students reach their potential. That’s what it’s all about.”



The 2002-2003 SkillsUSA VICA State Officers Team presented Ruth Gray with a special memory - the “We Love You Momma Ruth Award.”



**SkillsUSA
Kentucky
State
Director
Steve
Phillippi
and Ruth
Gray
during
various
functions.**



“When you say the name Ruth Gray, the topic goes to SkillsUSA. SkillsUSA Kentucky and Ruth Gray are connected. Ruth has spent most, if not all, of her teaching career affiliated with SkillsUSA (VICA). She has been a local advisor, board of directors member and chair, contest committee chair and judge, and above all state officer advisor,” says State Director Steve Phillippi. “She has touched the lives of many of our state's officers. The Kentucky Leadership Training Institute (KLTI) would not be of the caliber it is today without the assistance of Ruth. Her expertise with rules, regulations and knowledge is known throughout the national organization. I have had the pleasure of working with Ruth for many years. She is one of the best partners one can have. No task is too large for her. She is always there ready to assist with any situation. Ruth Gray is SkillsUSA Kentucky.”

Ruth Gray looks forward to many more years of helping students develop both in her classroom and through student organizations.

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